

n6 COMMENTARY ON MACAULAY'S HISTORY

While Macaulay was open to criticism for relying too much on inferior authorities and generalising too boldly from imperfect data, there could be no two opinions about the artistic skill with which he puts together his facts. With rapid and vigorous touches he brings before us a picture of seventeenth-century England. The arrangement of chapter iii deserves analysis. First he points out the smallness of the population, and the smallness of the revenue of the state, showing how that revenue was raised and expended, and giving an account of the army and navy. Then he passes to an account of the resources of the nation, its agriculture, its mineral products, and its trade, and under cover of explaining how the rents of the land were divided, takes the opportunity of describing the character of the governing classes of the nation, namely the gentry and the clergy. From the country he passes to the towns, and, sketching in succession the provincial capitals, the manufacturing towns, and the pleasure resorts, finally reaches London, which he describes at length. London is skilfully made the centre of the whole picture, not merely because it was the most populous city in Europe, but because it was the stage on which most of the events he meant to relate took place, because there political opinion was formed, and thence came the impulses

which determined the action of the state. To complete his picture it was necessary to describe the intellectual as well as the material condition of the nation, and the transition from one subject to the other was not easy. Macaulay solves the problem by describing the means of communication between the capital and the provinces ; the highways and the methods of travel; the post and methods of correspondence. As the mails conveyed the newspapers and news-letters which furnished provincials with their political